Cook's Meadow Ecological Restoration

Why is meadow restoration important?

The restoration of Cook's Meadow is the restoration of a dynamic and diverse wetland ecosystem. Meadows are sensitive areas that act almost like sponges, absorbing vital groundwater while creating nutrient-rich soils that support diverse vegetation and abundant wildlife. Yosemite has lost many acres of wetlands from draining, filling, and roads that have modified water flows.

What was involved in the restoration process?

The Cook's Meadow Restoration Project was a 6-year effort that brought the National Park Service together with a wide range of donors, volunteers, and park partners with a common goal: to restore scenic beauty and ecological integrity to a centerpiece of Yosemite Valley. To accomplish this, actions included:

- Filling 4 drainage ditches created by early Euro-American settlers that were designed to drain standing water, but were seriously affecting the natural flow of water across the meadow and, therefore, its overall health.
- Removing a raised, abandoned roadbed and a trail that bisected the meadow and further affected natural water flow.
- Reconstructing the trail on an elevated boardwalk that now allows water to flow freely and reduces foot traffic on sensitive meadow plants.
- Installing culverts under Sentinel Road to direct runoff into the meadow and restore the natural flow of water from the Merced River during seasonal periods of high water.
- Reducing non-native plant species encroaching on native species by using manual, mechanical, and chemical control methods.

What is next for the meadow?

Restoration of Cook's Meadow is largely complete, but National Park Service specialists will continue to monitor the meadow. This will include:

- Changes in the amount and distribution of water; both on the surface and underground, as a result of restoration.
- Changes in the abundance and distribution of native wetland plant species and non-native plant species.

Information such as this will be valuable for future meadow and wetland restoration efforts in Yosemite.